



November 8, 2006

Bi-weekly newsletter

Ambassador Beyrle Honored by Bulgaria's National Institute of Justice



Ambassador John Beyrle addresses the trainers and staff of the National Institute of Justice in Sofia.

Ambassador John Beyrle toured the National Institute of Justice (NIJ), the primary training institution for Bulgarian judges, prosecutors, investigators and court administrative staff, and received the first-ever "Sign of Honor" from NIJ Director Pencho Penev on October 20 in Sofia. The medal recognizes the work of Ambassador Beyrle and the United States Government in support the rule of law in Bulgaria, and in the development of the NIJ. Ambassador Beyrle pledged that the United States will continue to find ways to bolster the work of the Institute.

USAID has provided more than \$1 million in support for the NIJ since its origins as the Magistrate Training Center in 1999. Through the Judicial Development Project, and later the Judicial Strengthening Initiative, USAID has assisted with curriculum, faculty, and program development; continuing judge training; and building renovations. In his address, Ambassador Beyrle underscored the essential role of the state in developing a well-educated judiciary. ❖

Commercial Law Reform Partners Take Stock of Successes, Plan Next Steps

After three years of promoting reforms, USAID/Bulgaria's Commercial Law Reform Program (CLRP) announced the completion of work in three of its four program areas. Marking the end of assistance in commercial registration, commercial dispute resolution and commercial law training, CLRP organized a Closing Partners Meeting on October 27. The event captured the attention and imagination of more than 100 people through a combination of presentation techniques: multimedia presentation, facilitated discussion groups, and a short film showing the CLRP team in action.

In his opening remarks, Mission Director Michael Fritz observed that in just three years CLRP has "successfully promoted tremendously difficult and meaningful reforms." He recognized key Bulgarian counterparts and noted that assistance through CLRP will focus on judgment enforcement, adding that USAID will support the local law firm Sabev & Partners to further implement business registration reform.



Mediation trainer Doriana Hristova leads a group discussion on commercial mediation at the CLRP close-out event

At the evening reception, Ambassador John Beyrle acknowledged the difficulties Bulgaria faced in transitioning to a market economy and raised a glass to toast CLRP's Bulgarian partners in building a better business climate. ❖



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Authentic Bulgaria Initiative Offers Alternative to Mass Tourism

On November 1 Mission Director Michael Fritz presented certificates to the first 37 hotel owners to qualify for the new and prestigious Authentic Bulgaria Quality Mark featuring the Bulgarian rose on a Thracian coin.

The Authentic Bulgaria Quality Mark is a USAID-financed initiative establishing the benchmark for new and improved tourism products incorporating the unique Bulgarian hospitality, culture, and cuisine. It will help strengthen the authentic tourism sector and place Bulgaria on the map for future foreign travelers as a unique and desired tourism destination. It aims to provide an alternative to the mass tourism which generates minimal economic benefits, especially for smaller tourism operators.

Both USAID and the Bulgarian government have recognized that tourism should be ranked as one of the priority sectors for improved economic development. Through the "Authentic Bulgaria" Quality Mark Program, USAID is creating a sustainable mechanism for ensuring independent guaranteed quality standards, which will benefit the tourism industry as a whole.



The program aims to assess an additional 60 accommodation providers from across Bulgaria this year. Those that pass the independent certification system will be awarded the Quality Mark with a qualifying grade of gold, silver or bronze. The Quality Mark will provide tourists seeking a high quality, unique Bulgarian experience with a basis for selecting accommodation. ❖

USAID Mission Director Launches Local Tourism Promotion



The collaboration between USAID and the tourism sector in Belogradchik started in 2005 when representatives from the city participated in study tours in best tourism practices organized by the USAID Labor Market Project (LMP) and the Bulgarian Alternative Tourism Association (BAAT). Participants learned from the experience of other regions with well-functioning tourism associations and as a result the Belogradchik Association for Alternative Tourism was established in January 2006.

Most recently USAID supported the association's launch of an informational billboard in the center of the town. Mission Director Michael Fritz inaugurated the billboard on October 24 during his visit to the northwest region of Bulgaria.

Among the future goals of the association is the establishment of Bulgaria's first geological park, aimed at attracting the 30,000 tourists who visit the region annually. ❖

Violence against a Private Enforcement Agent

USAID notes with great concern that in the morning of October 24, a private enforcement agent, Nedyalka Kovacheva, was severely beaten up by two men in front of her office. The woman is hospitalized with serious injuries. The attackers did not steal anything. The matter is still under investigation. USAID's Commercial Law Reform Program works closely with private enforcement agents to improve legitimate debt collection in the country.

As the efficiency of collection improves, enforcement agents sometimes face threats and pressure. USAID's partner, the Chamber of Private Enforcement Agents, reacted promptly by issuing a press release condemning the act, thanking the Ministry of Interior for the quick reaction, and appealing to the Minister of Interior and the Chief Prosecutor for a serious and expeditious investigation.